



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

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Fact Sheet

PAST ARTIFACT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE INVESTIGATIONS BY U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (ICE)

1) ICE AGENTS RECOVER THOUSANDS OF TREASURED IRAQI ARTIFACTS



Before hostilities began in Iraq, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deployed a team of agents to the Middle East at the request of the U.S. Central Command to look for evidence of U.S. companies that may have supplied Iraq with weaponry. Building on this mission, ICE agents played a critical role in recovering artifacts missing or looted from the Iraqi National Museum.

After reports of looting from Iraqi museums first surfaced, the ICE team launched an immediate art recovery effort with the U.S. military. ICE agents worked with curators at the Iraq National Museum to catalogue missing items. They also launched a campaign to prompt the return of items by advertising rewards and an amnesty for anyone voluntarily returning artifacts. As the campaign progressed, ICE developed information on the location of secret vaults in Iraq where artifacts had been stored before the war.

To date, these efforts have resulted in roughly 1,000 missing artifacts and 39,500 manuscripts recovered. Among these was the fabled "Treasure of Nimrud," a collection of more than 600 precious items dating back to the Assyrian civilization in 800 B.C., which ICE agents located in a vault under the Central Bank of Iraq. ICE agents have also recovered a priceless vase from the 5th Century B.C. and a statue of an Assyrian king dating back to 900 B.C.

2) ICE RETURNS 14th CENTURY MANUSCRIPT TO VIENNA JEWISH COMMUNITY



In November 2003, ICE returned a 14th-century Hebrew manuscript, stolen by the Nazis during World War II, to the Jewish Community Organization of Vienna, Austria. The manuscript is one of the oldest versions of the Kabalistic text known as "Sepher Yetzirah" and is valued at approximately \$68,000.

The ICE investigation began in March 2002, when a newspaper article reported that the manuscript was to be sold at a New York auction house. The probe revealed that Aaron Stefansky, a U.S. citizen, had smuggled the manuscript into the United States after purchasing it from an antiquities dealer in Israel.

On June 10, 2002, New York ICE agents seized the manuscript after determining that it had been stolen by the Nazis from the Jewish community in Austria. The auction house agreed to retain custody of the manuscript pending the outcome of the investigation. In March 2003, Stefansky was arrested and pleaded guilty for his role in smuggling the manuscript for commercial purposes. Stefansky was later sentenced in the Southern District of New York.

3) ICE RETURNS 1,400-YEAR-OLD ARTIFACTS TO HONDURAS

In September 2003, ICE returned 279 smuggled Pre-Columbian artifacts to the government of Honduras. The Pre-Columbian artifacts, which included ornate figurines, bowls, and pottery made by the Mayan culture in Honduras between approximately 600 and 900 A.D., had been purchased in Honduras and illegally smuggled to the United States in 1998.

In 1998, Douglas Hall, 45, of Ohio, and Tulio Monterroso-Bonilla, 39, of Guatemala, traveled to Honduras where they purchased the artifacts for \$11,000, according to a federal indictment. The items were then shipped through Miami and falsely declared as having a value of \$37. They were later offered for sale at a shop in Ohio. ICE investigators discovered that the articles had been smuggled, and in June 2002, a federal grand jury in Ohio indicted Hall and Monterroso-Bonilla in connection with the smuggling effort. Hall was convicted in Oct. 2002. Monterroso-Bonilla pleaded guilty in August 2002.

4) ICE RETURNS HISTORIC PISTOL TO SWITZERLAND



In February 2004, ICE returned to Switzerland the oldest surviving example in the world of a prototype self-loading 1898 Borchardt Luger pistol. The pistol was stolen in 1996 from Switzerland's Waffenfabrik museum.

After months of investigation, ICE agents in Texas seized the rare pistol from an internationally known antique firearms collector in July 2003. Experts from a British auction house later determined that the 106-year old pistol, worth approximately \$720,000, had been stolen from the Swiss.

5) ICE AGENTS SEIZE STOLEN 16th CENTURY MEXICAN ALTARPIECE

In April 2004, ICE agents seized a stolen, 500-year-old Judeo-Christian altarpiece that was being offered for sale at a price of \$225,000 in an art consignment shop in Santa Fe, N.M. The ICE investigation determined that the altarpiece had been stolen in April 2001 from a convent in Puebla, Mexico. ICE is currently protecting the altarpiece and intends to return it to the people of Mexico. The ICE investigation continues.

6) ICE RETURNS ANCIENT ARTIFACTS TO PERUVIAN GOVERNMENT

In April 2004, ICE returned a variety of recovered artifacts to the government of Peru. The artifacts were seized in three separate ICE investigations into antiquities smugglers and dealers in several states after being smuggled from protected archeological sites in Peru by individuals who sought them for their personal collections or who intended to sell them for profit. Dating from 100 A.D. to 1,530 A.D., the items came from Mochica, Chimu and Chancay cultures. They included a rare mother-of-pearl knife, gold and plaque ornaments, nose jewelry, copper pins, pottery and textile fragments.

#ICE#

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